

Resurrection by everheartings

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Summary:

Nancy comes out of that week in November with a boyfriend and a boy she can't get off her mind.

They're not the same boy.

Resurrection

Author's Note:

So I've written fifty pages of long scenes for my thesis and my brain is fried. So I wrote something completely different.

Un-beta'd, as always.

Nancy's room phone is yellow, fading, and it never rings.

Steve doesn't call, not to her personal phone, only to the main line. Her mom has to shout up the stairs and Nancy takes the call perched on the kitchen counter. She never gave him her number. Only Barb has it.

He's trying to be a good boyfriend. Steve's stuck to Nancy's side now, in a way that doesn't feel like puppy love. It's vigilance. He watches her as if she might vanish into nothing. When they stand together he keeps one hand cupped tight to the back of her neck.

Weekends are the hardest. There's no school to occupy her thoughts and Steve is a car ride away. Nancy sleeps late, spends the days in her pajamas. Lets her hair become a thundercloud around her head. Sometimes she plays D&D with Mike and his friends—she just watches really, but they always tell her she can join in. She doesn't say no, but she hasn't said yes yet, either.

Mike leaves open two places at the table. One is for Will Byers. No one talks about the other empty chair, but Nancy knows to sit on the floor.

“You okay, Nance?” Steve asks her before third period. He keeps searching her face, as if he can’t make sense of her bagged eyes and her messy hair.

Nancy holds her textbooks tight against her chest. “Just a long night, that’s all. Stayed up late studying for a test.”

She’d gone to bed at four and dreamt of faceless monsters, of slugs, blonde hair and baseball bats held in bandaged hands.

She heads down the hall without Steve, but he catches up fast. He hooks one arm around her waist, pulls her right up against his chest. Nancy thinks of all the times she’s rested her cheek against his bare skin, traced the bump of his ribs and let him crawl over her so she didn’t see the dark shapes twisting up her bedroom walls.

“I’m not gonna let anything get you,” Steve says. “You know that, right?”

Nancy knows. He showed her that night when he came back, and every night after when he kept climbing through her window.

She can’t tell him it’s not always about that.

At school, she doesn’t talk to Jonathan. She doesn’t know how, or what words to use. He’s always got the camera she bought him

hanging around his neck, and Nancy will catch him pointing it her way over lunch. He never releases the shutter when she smiles at him. He always turns away.

He didn't come to school for a month after Will came back and she saw him three times—once at Christmas, twice after New Years. She kissed his cheek and she found that afterwards neither of them had much else to say.

The phone rings. It is Tuesday night and Nancy shoves her homework from her lap. She picks up mid-ring, so quick she can still feel the plastic vibrating.

“Barb,” she says, “Barb, I’m here.” Her whole body is shaking. “Where are you?”

Silence. The sound of labored breathing.

Maybe Barb's trapped in there, in that dark place, scared and alone. Nancy can imagine Barb, so smart and practical, in her own hiding place that the monsters can't see; she's going to ace the APs, get in to some big name college, everyone knows it. The breath rattles in Nancy's ear again and she feels the dust spreading through her chest, eating at the soft tissues lungs have, the fragile chambers she marked down in Anatomy. She remembers what it was like in there, cold and dark and wet, her heart in her throat and her lips blackening—

“Nancy.” Jonathan's voice is in her ear, jerking her back. “Nancy, it's me. Mike gave me your number.” He sounds soft across the line, but there's a graininess to his words like he's been yelling. “Sorry,” he

says, "I'm sorry. I didn't think."

It's as if Barb vanished all over again.

Steve walks Nancy to each of her classes, even though they only share two. She's sure it means he's late to all of his own, but she can't stand walking by herself. Steve keeps one hand low on her back, his thumb rubbing up and down the pilling fabric of her cardigan.

There's a poster for yearbook recruiting pinned up on the school bulletin board—they need more people this year. There's more to document; they have a spread to make, for Barbara. Nancy rips the paper down and shoves it in her jacket pocket.

She drives Mike over to the Byers's for the first time since winter break. The house looks better than it did before; the Christmas lights still line the roof, but inside, the walls have new paper and the carpet's been replaced. It looks like a home now. All hints of the monster that stalked there have been washed away.

When Jonathan answers the door, his hands are wet, sudsy, like he'd been doing dishes. The sleeves of his flannel are rolled up and Nancy can see the thin blue lines of his veins beneath his skin. He leans against the counter while she sits at the table. His gaze never leaves her face for long.

"I'm joining yearbook," Nancy says, to break the silence. "I turned in my application during lunch today."

“I never pegged you as the type.”

“They’re making a page for Barb. I’m gonna make sure it gets done right.” Nancy places her next words carefully, trying to keep out the nerves. “Would you join? If I asked you to?”

“I’d think about it,” Jonathan says. And then: “Are you asking me?”

Mike’s got the same ashy look Nancy wears when she’s alone, eyes sunk in deep and reddening. He’s looking for someone who isn’t there. He’ll knock on her door late, after their parents have gone to bed, and Nancy can always tell when he’s been crying. They sneak down to the kitchen together.

Over a bowl of ice cream and snotty sleeves, Mike asks, “What if she doesn’t come back?”

Nancy doesn’t know how to answer, so she gives him another scoop of chocolate.

Steve takes her on dates every Sunday night. It’s like coming back to life, getting ready. Pieces of her sliding back into place just in time for the week to start. She tugs on her jeans and boots, wears her softest sweaters—the kind of clothes that Steve likes to see rumpled up on his floor as she falls into bed with him.

In those moments, she won’t let herself think of what it would be like, kissing Jonathan.

Nancy calls Barb's number and some other girl picks up. Her voice is a high nasal, nothing like Barb's. "Hello?" the girl says. "Who's there?" Nancy can't speak. Her jaw is locked tight. After a minute, the girl slams down the receiver.

"Sorry," Nancy says to the dial tone, "Wrong number."

The next time Mike invites her to play D&D with Lucas and Dustin, Nancy says yes. She is a cleric. Every time one of the boys is defeated, she raises them up from the dead.

Steve's having a party, a bigger one than the last. Nancy's mother drives her over, says she'll be back to pick Nancy up at eleven—the extra hour an olive branch since Barb isn't sitting in the back seat.

The beer is warm and Nancy downs three cans in a row, quick enough she feels them hit her all at once. Outside, it starts to rain. The sky flashes with lighting, the pool turning an electric, clear blue. She stands at the window and watches.

Steve creeps up behind her and wraps his arms tight around her waist. "It's been months, Nance," he says, "She's not there."

Will Byers calls and says he's coming over on Saturday. Nancy helps Mike plan the campaign. It's the first time he's been happy—breathlessly, weightlessly happy—since Will vanished in November.

Nancy leaves an extra spot on the team, just in case.

She's just expecting Will, but when she carries down the snacks, Jonathan's waiting at the basement door. He's got on a T-shirt, no jacket, and Nancy's wearing a dress that shows off the freckles on her arms. They both stop a moment as they get reacquainted, gazes roaming the unfamiliar slopes of each other's shoulders, the sharp poke of collarbones.

"Jonathan," Will says, "How about you play with us?"

"Nancy's a wood elf," Mike adds. "Last week she dressed up." There's a look on his face that she's never seen before, sly and secret and shared with Will.

Jonathan sits in the chair next to Nancy's. She can feel his knee jostling, his jeans pressed against the bare stretch of her thigh. He plays as a rogue and spends the game picking locks and stealing religious relics for Nancy to use in her spellwork. When she gets cold, Jonathan runs out to his Ford to grab his sweater. She could of gotten her own, but she likes how it feels to wear Jonathan's, how it makes him look at her.

She knows what line they're toeing, and it's not wrong, but it isn't right either. If Nancy pulled him aside and told him to stop, Jonathan would. He's the type of boy who cries when he shoots rabbits. Those boys only steal things that want to get stolen.

"Isn't that Jonathan's?" Steve asks when she climbs into the car on Sunday, tugging on the cuff of her sweater.

“We both like stripes,” Nancy says. “They’re just similar.”

The first time she talks about Barbara in past tense, she has to run to the bathroom and empty out her lunch. She just finished up with yearbook and is cleaning up her desk. Steve waits outside the door, talking to a gaggle of blonde-haired sophomores. He slides his arm around Nancy’s shoulders when she comes out, and the girls all squeak out their apologies. How sorry they are about Barb.

“She hated girls like those,” Nancy says once they’re gone. “She thought they were all fakes.”

It takes a moment to realize what she’s done.

On the nights Steve can’t stay over, Nancy calls the Byers’s landline from her room. Jonathan is always awake, no matter how late it is. She sleeps better after talking to him.

“Why did Mike give you my number?” she asks, eyes heavy and half-lidded, a stray eyelash tickling across her cheek.

“For emergencies. Just in case we needed it.”

Nancy likes how quiet the dark room is. For once she’s not afraid of the shadowy shapes, the red light that flickers softly. She sits on the floor, her forehead on her knees, and Jonathan stands above her,

messing with the chemicals and pinning up his photos. Jonathan, who lets her keep one hand wrapped firm around his ankle, who says, “Nancy,” real quiet when he steps away and helps her up to her feet when it’s time to leave.

She feels dizzy when they come out, blinking and heady. It’s not from the chemicals. She knows she has to tell Steve, but her tongue sticks tight to her mouth whenever she sees him.

Nancy is down in the basement when Steve comes over to study Chemistry, and she forgets she bolted her window shut. She doesn’t hear the doorbell ring, or her mother’s soft hello. Nancy’s focused on the dice in her hands, the warm plastic and damp palm sweat. She’s rolling for a resurrection spell. Dustin took a troll club to the skull and it’s up to her to save him.

Steve coughs at the top of the stairs when he sees her and Nancy fumbles the dice—they come up with a three. It’s not enough. She’s not sure why she cries about it.

Barbara’s spread is nearly done. Nancy’s been photocopying pictures and pasting them together for weeks. All of their favorite memories—the Halloween corn maze when both of them dressed as cats, middle school field day, the diner where they split shakes. The head editor keeps saying she wants quotes from students, but no one in Hawkins knows Barb the way Nancy does.

None of them even cared.

She calls Steve on her personal phone when she can’t take it

anymore. From the hollow ring to his voice, he seems to know what's coming, but he drives over anyway. Nancy keeps the window open for him and fiddles with the phone cord while she waits.

"It's Jonathan, isn't it?" Steve has his hands in his pockets. Nancy's never noticed how his words whistle through his teeth when he's nervous. "That's what this is."

"I was going to tell you sooner," she whispers. She sits on her bed and pulls her knees up to her chest. "We never kissed."

"You didn't have to, Nance," Steve says and the pet name catches on her ribs.

The whole weekend she cleans the house. She sweeps the baseboards, coughing at the dust, and hauls out the old boxes from attic to organize their Christmas lights. She rearranges the pictures on the mantle. The kitchen Nancy saves for last; she scrubs the tiles on her hands and knees, her skirt growing damp and a sharp ache shooting up through her back, her legs.

At the end of the day, her muscles are sore, but she doesn't feel any better.

She cradles the receiver against her cheek when she calls Jonathan, the phone cord all tangled up in her legs. It takes five rings for him to pick up, and once she hears his voice, the strength she's been saving up goes right out of her. "I've done a bad thing," Nancy says, sounding as if she's swallowed wet cotton. "Take me somewhere. Please."

Jonathan's Ford doesn't have a working heater, so Nancy curls up tight in the passenger seat. They're stopped at an intersection and the red light pulses across Jonathan's face. She's still in her silk pajamas, but he has on two shirts, a coat of thick corduroy, black jeans—armor, maybe, or a wall running between them.

"Does Steve know?" he asks. He's got his camera in his lap and he fiddles with the strap. "Maybe you shouldn't be here."

Nancy looks at him, the mess of blonde hair and his twisted, nervous smile. The scar on his hand that glows white. She remembers bandaging it with gauze, stroking along the palm to try to give comfort. Something started then, or before it.

"It's a little late for that," she says, and kisses him.

Jonathan's quiet after, driving loops through Hawkins and glancing over at her with a kid smile. Nancy rests her cheek up against the windowpane. The night cool seeps into her cheek, but it doesn't do anything to the heat burning across her skin. Her neck must be red. Jonathan must see it.

He parks them in front of the diner where she and Barb used to go, and it makes her chest ache, a little. She's not sure if it's ever going to go away. Losses like this don't just heal over.

"Nancy," Jonathan says, "Don't move." He lifts his camera, adjusting the focus to frame her face, maybe, or the silky impression of her

collarbones beneath her pajama shirt. “I’m going to take it now,” he says, quiet, and it feels important.

He’s letting her say no. He doesn’t get that she wants this.

“I’m ready,” she says and hears the click of the shutter.

Author’s Note:

I'm not gonna say Nancy did right by Steve in this, but that wasn't really the point.

I'm happy to answer any questions in the comments, or on my tumblr. Link in my bio.

Title from the D&D move Nancy keeps trying to pull. Let's see if it sticks.